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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis in the present study is that in work situations which evoke sex role stereotypes, women will respond less stereotypically than males since it is in their best interest to do so. The method comes from the Rosen et al. (1975) study of male managers. In the present study, 293 introductory psychology students were asked to role play an executive vice-president of a large retail clothing chain. They were given five in-basket decision tasks, involving either male or female employees, following the tasks designed by Rosen and his colleagues. All five in-baskets involved behavior that is considered more appropriate for one sex than the other. The situations concerned hiring for a position requiring extensive travel, promotion of a person who stated that family life comes before work, response to an employee whose spouse has been offered a lucrative position elsewhere, response to a request for leave of absence to care for one's children, and deciding the appropriateness of a person's attendance at his/her spouse's company parties. Both male and female subjects, the majority of whom were first semester freshmen, responded to the in-basket situations in a somewhat less stereotypical manner than Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich's male managers. In general, females are not less discriminatory than males although there are differences between the sexes in specific areas. Despite the rhetoric about a loosening of sex role stereotypes, however, results suggest that both young males and young females may still respond in a fairly stereotypical manner to work situations which evoke sex role stereotypes. (Author)

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Differential Response of Males and Females to Work Situations Which Evoke Sex Role Stereotypes

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Abstract

Discrimination against women--and men to a lesser extent--has been documented in a number of areas of the world of work (Levinson, 1976; Rosen, Jerdee, & Prestwich, 1975; Bass, 1972). Many of these discriminatory behaviors can be attributed to sex role stereotypes. That is, managers act in a discriminatory manner because they follow stereotypes about men and women. Many of these studies of discrimination only involve male subjects (e.g., Rosen, Jerdee, & Prestwich, 1975; Bass, 1971) since most supervisory positions are held by males. While there is some research which suggests that women also discriminate against women (e.g., Goldberg, 1968), others claim that women in decision-making roles would not be as discriminatory as men. The hypothesis in the present study is that in work situations which evoke sex role stereotypes, women will respond less stereotypically than males since it is in their best interest to do so.

The method comes from the Rosen et al. (1975) study of male managers. In the present study, 293 introductory psychology students were asked to role play an executive vice-president of a large retail clothing chain. They were given five in-basket decision tasks, involving either male or female employees, following the tasks designed by Rosen and his colleagues. All five in-baskets involved behavior that is considered more appropriate for one sex than the other. The situations concerned hiring for a position requiring extensive travel, promotion of a person who stated that family life comes before work, response to an employee whose spouse has been offered a lucrative position elsewhere, response to a request for leave of absence to care for one's children, and deciding the appropriateness of a person's attendance at his/her spouse's company parties.

Both male and female subjects, the majority of whom are first semester freshmen, responded to the in-basket situations in a somewhat less stereotypical manner than Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich's male managers. In general, females are not less discriminatory than males although there are differences between the sexes in specific areas. Despite the rhetoric about a loosening of sex role stereotypes, however, results suggest that both young males and young females may still respond in a fairly stereotypical manner to work situations which evoke sex role stereotypes.

Differential Response of Males and Females

to Work Situations Which Evoke

Sex Role Stereotypes

Discrimination against women--and men to a lesser extent--has been documented in a number of areas of the world of work. For example, there are many studies which show that equally qualified males and females are differentially evaluated during job selection and placement. A series of studies by Dipboye and his colleagues (Dipboye,Fromkin, & Wiback, 1975; Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1977, in press; Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1976; Dipboye& Wiley, 1977, in press) support the notion that under certain conditions females are discriminated against in resume evaluations or employment interviews. Other studies (e.g., Rosen & Jerdee, 1974; Fidell, 1975; Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Shaw, 1972) show that females are rated as less attractive than males in a hiring situation, and in fact, females are less likely to be hired.

Similarly, in more general evaluation situations, females are often evaluated in less favorable terms than males. For example, Goldberg's frequently cited study (1968) showed that female authors are evaluated less favorably than male authors. Deaux and Emswiller (1974) found that given successful performance, success is attributed to ability for males but is attributed to luck for females. In essence, female accomplishments were undermined. And Bass (1971) found discriminatory attitudes among his sample of male managers.

There are several reasons why females may be evaluated less favorably than males. One possibility is that males are simply valued more than females and that therefore their attributes, qualities, and accomplishments are more valued than the same attributes, qualities, or accomplishments in females. McKee and Sherriffs (1957) and Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, and Vogel (1970) found support for this hypothesis.

A second explanation for the differential evaluation of males and females can be found in the literature on stereotyping. That is, females would be evaluated

less favorably than males when the situation evokes a male sex role stereotype and males would be evaluated less favorably when the situation evokes a female sex role stereotype.

Indeed, there is evidence to support the stereotyping hypothesis. For example, Cohen and Bunker (1975) found that while males, in comparison to equally qualified females, were more likely to be chosen for a position of personnel technician, a "male" job, females, in comparison to equally qualified males, were more likely to be chosen for the position of editorial assistant, a "female" job. Similarly, Levinson (1976) found that males responding to newspaper want ads for stereotypically female jobs were just as discriminated against as females responding to newspaper ads for stereotypically male jobs. The nature of the discrimination differed in that males were often told that they wouldn't want such a boring or poorly paying job, but nonetheless, the discrimination against males applying for female positions was strong.

One explanation then for the general finding that females are often discriminated against in work organizations is that many of the work situations evaluated evoke a male sex role stereotype. In other words, in much of the research on differential evaluation of males and females, the setting or situation or job description evokes a male sex role stereotype. Experimental subjects respond to the stereotype and the data reveal differential evaluations of males and females. Goldberg's (1968) study and a related study by Pheterson, Goldberg, and Kiesler (1972), both of which used female subjects, suggest that females respond to sex role stereotypes in the same manner as males. Many of the studies involving personnel selection and placement utilize managers or campus recruiters, the majority of whom are male. Therefore, there is little data comparing the way that males and females respond in evaluating males and females in specific job situations.

The present study is concerned with the way in which both males and females evaluate male and female subjects in specific work situations which evoke sex role stereotypes.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 293 introductory psychology students, 141 females and 152 males, who participated voluntarily during class time in what was described as a decision-making task. The majority of students were first year freshmen.

Task

Subjects were presented with five in-basket tasks. They were asked to role-play the vice-president of a fictitious department store and to make a decision about each of five situations which were described in a booklet. The tasks were taken from the Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich (1975) study of male managers. Each of the five situations evoked a sex role stereotype. The first scenario involved either a male or female applicant for a position which required extensive travel. The second incident involved a valued male or female employee whose spouse has been offered a lucrative position elsewhere. The question is what, if anything, the organization should do to try to retain the valued employee. The third incident involves a decision to promote or not promote an employee (male or female) who admits that family responsibilities come before work responsibilities. The fourth incident involves the appropriateness of a male or female employee's request for a leave of absence to care for his/her children. And the fifth scenario is designed to assess the responsibility of a person to foster his/her spouse's career by attending social activities sponsored by the spouse's work organization.

Procedure

Subjects responded to all five decision tasks. Two forms were prepared,

varying the sex of the employee. Form A first described a male applicant, follow by female employee, male employee, male employee, female employee. The other half of subjects received the other form which first described a female applicant a male employee, two female employees, and finally, a male employee. The two forms were randomly assigned to subjects. A debriefing session showed that subjects were not aware of the significance of the sex of the applicant/employee.

Analysis and Results

Discussion of results will emphasize differences between the response of male and female subjects, but will also be compared with the results obtained by Rose Jerdee, and Prestwich (1975) in their study of male managers. T-tests or bivariate tables where appropriate, were performed separately for male and female subjects. Two by two analyses of variance (sex of subject by sex of employee) were also performed on the data; few significant interactions were found, but those are reported. In general, females were just as discriminatory as males and both male and female students were somewhat less discriminatory than Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich's (1975) male managers.

Table 1 shows the results of the in-basket task concerned with hiring a male (Carl Wood) or female (Karen Wood) applicant for a position requiring extensive travel. Subjects were asked whether or not the applicant should be hired and to rate the applicant on suitability for the job and potential for long service to the organization. Both male and female subjects thought the male and female applicants were equally suitable for the job, but both sexes were more likely to hire the male applicant and to rate the male applicant higher on potential longevity with the organization. There are no significant sex of subject by sex of applicant interactions in these data. Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich's male managers showed significant differences favoring males on all three questions.

Table 1 about here

Table 2 shows the way male and female subjects responded on the issue of promoting either Margaret Adams or Michael Adams who has performed credibly for the organization but who has stated that family responsibilities take precedence over work obligations. Male and female subjects do not differ in their evaluation of Margaret or Michael, although the evaluation of male subjects approaches significance ($p = .06$). Only 23% of male subjects would promote Margaret in comparison with 40% of male Ss who would promote Michael. There is no significant interaction between sex of subject and sex of employee. Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich (1975) found a highly significant difference in evaluation of Michael and Margaret ($p < .01$) by their male manager sample.

Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows the results of the third in-basket task. Here subjects were presented with the case of a valued employee, a computer operator, whose spouse has been offered a lucrative position elsewhere. What steps should the organization take to retain Rachel or Ronald Cooper? Subjects were presented with four options and asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how much they agreed with each statement. The options were to offer the employee a large raise; to try to persuade the employee to stay because she/he has invested too much into the job to leave; find a position for the computer operator's spouse in this organization which is competitive with his/her present offer; and not to influence the employee one way or the other. Male subjects do not respond differentially to Rachel or Ronald, and female subjects treat the two employees equally in terms of offering a raise or trying to persuade the employee to stay. However female subjects are more likely to agree with the statement that the organization should try to find Ronald's spouse a job within the organization and more likely to agree that the organization should not try to influence Rachel one way or the other. Sex of subject by sex of employee interaction is significant ($F =$

1.65, df = 5/270, $p < .05$) for finding spouse a job. Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich's managers responded differentially to male and female employee on all four options ($p < .01$). They were more likely to try to convince the male computer operator to stay, more likely to offer a sizeable raise to the male computer operator, more likely to find an attractive position within the organization for the male employee's wife, and more likely to agree with the statement "Don't try to influence the computer operator" in the case of the female employee than the male employee.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 shows the mean scores for male and female subjects on the issue of request for leave of absence. Ralph Brown (Ruth Brown), an accountant, has requested two months' leave of absence to care for the couple's children. Brown's spouse who is a junior high school principal cannot take the time off and the couple is unable to find a satisfactory babysitter. Subjects were asked to rate the appropriateness of the request and state whether a leave without pay should be granted or whether a leave with pay should be granted. Female subjects did not differ in their evaluation of Ruth and Ralph. Male subjects did not differ in their rating of the appropriateness of the leave or in whether they would grant a leave with pay. They were, however, more likely to grant the male employee leave without pay than the female employee. Interaction between sex of subject and sex of employee was not significant. Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich found that a leave of absence was perceived as more appropriate for the female employee than the male employee and leave without pay was more often granted to the female employee ($p < .01$). There were no differences in granting leave with pay.

Table 4 about here

The fifth in-basket involved a transcript of a husband and wife arguing over whether the freelance writer spouse of an aspiring manager should attend boring company parties. For half of the subjects Judy Garrison is the manager and her husband, Jack, is a writer. For the other half of the subjects, Jack is the manager and Judy is the writer who is reluctant to attend Jack's company parties. Subjects were asked to resolve the Garrisons' argument. Should the spouse of a manager attend the manager's company parties, parties which may have career implications for an aspiring manager? Subjects were asked to check one of three options: The spouse should go to the parties and stop making a fuss, the manager should attend parties alone, and the manager should stop attending parties. Male subjects responded the same to Judy, the manager, as to Jack, the manager. They were fairly evenly divided between spouse attending managerial parties and manager attending parties alone. Female respondents, however, thought that it was more important for a wife to attend her husband's company parties than it is for a husband to attend his wife's parties ($p < .01$). Furthermore, there is a significant interaction between sex of subject and sex of manager ($F = 3.96$, $df = 1/273$, $p < .01$). Whereas about two-fifths of males thought that either Judy or Jack should attend his/her spouse's parties, over 50% of female subjects thought that Judy the writer should attend Jack's parties but only one-third of female subjects thought that Jack, the writer, should attend Judy's parties. Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich (1975) found that male managers' evaluation of the dilemma was highly dependent on the sex of the manager. Male managers' wives should attend business parties ($p < .001$).

Table 5 about here

Discussion

In general, both male and female students respond in a sex role stereotypically appropriate manner in specific work situations. Students, however, appear to respond less stereotypically than a group of male managers studied by Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich (1975). Although Rosen et al. had a much larger sample than the present study (N = 1442 compared with N = 293) which makes comparison of p-values difficult, a comparison of distribution of percentages and t-test scores indicates that students are less stereotyped in their response than managers.

Although both males and females respond some of the time in a stereotyped manner, it is interesting just where the stereotypes emerge. For example, a female applicant was rated just as suitable for a job involving travel as a male applicant. However, the female was less likely to be hired. And although the female applicant (and the male applicant) already had 11 years of relevant work experience, the male applicant was judged to have greater potential for long service with the organization.

Students did not differ in their evaluations of a male who asked for time off for child care in comparison to a female who asked for child-care leave time. And students did not differentially evaluate the promotion of male and female employee who said that home and family responsibilities took precedence over work obligations.

Although females, in general, were not less stereotyped than male students, there were some interesting differences between the answers of male and female students. For example, males seem to believe that male employees are more likely to remain with a company for a long period than comparable female employees. The results of male subjects' comparison of potential longevity of service of a male and female applicant were highly significant.

Female subjects' responses to organizational attempts to influence a valued employee whose spouse has been offered a job elsewhere were intriguing. Females

were strongly in favor of an organization offering a male employee's wife (who has another job offer) an attractive position in her husband's organization. Female subjects also favored leaving a female employee alone, that is, not trying to influence her to stay when her husband has been offered a position elsewhere. Perhaps the female subjects were responding from the viewpoint of the couple's relationship. If a female is offered a lucrative position in another geographic area, an ideal solution (from the viewpoint of the relationship) would be for her husband's company to offer her a comparable position. Then the husband wouldn't have to begin job hunting and he wouldn't feel that he was following his wife around. On the other hand, when the husband was offered a job elsewhere, female respondents preferred that the organization not attempt to influence the female computer operator. If her husband has a job elsewhere, it might be easier for the wife to quit her job and follow him if the organization doesn't intervene through persuasive talks or by offering a large salary increase.

Finally, beliefs of women about a wife's responsibility to support her husband's career as evidenced through female subjects' response to the Garrisons' argument is also interesting. Women may be willing to stand up for their rights in their own career, but they also seem to feel they should provide career-enhancing support to their husbands, support which they don't expect from husbands in return. Not one of 74 female respondents thought that Jack, an aspiring manager, should stop attending company parties because his freelance writer wife hated those parties. Over half of female subjects thought that the wife should attend parties which may enhance her husband's career.

Despite the rhetoric about loosening of sex role stereotypes, our data suggest that young men and women may still respond in a stereotypical manner in very concrete situations which evoke sex role stereotypes. Although the data

are not overwhelming, there seems to be less discrimination against men in stereotypical feminine situations (e.g., asking for leave to babysit) than the reverse. And while there is less discrimination in blatant instances (e.g., a women with 11 years of relevant work experience being judged unsuitable for a job), discrimination still exists in more subtle forms (e.g., anticipated longevity of service with an organization, or a wife's responsibility to participate in activities which are career enhancing to her husband).

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Table 1

Mean Scores of Male and Female Respondents on Decision to Hire Male or Female Applicant

	Female Subjects			Male Subjects		
	Karen	Carl		Karen	Carl	
	Mean	Mean	t	Mean	Mean	t
Decision to hire[a]	1.59	1.35	2.90*	1.71	1.39	4.10**
Suitability for job	3.65	3.73	-0.47	3.40	3.60	-1.18
Potential longevity with company	2.59	3.25	-3.05*	2.30	3.13	51.94**
N	66	75		78	73	

[a] Low score favorable to hiring; for others, high score favorable to hiring.

* $p < .005$
** $p < .001$

Table 2

Male and Female Respondents' Distribution of Responses on Promotion of Male or Female Applicant

	Females		Males	
	Margaret	Michael	Margaret	Michael
Do not promote	16.7%	20.0%	28.2%	18.1%
Discuss	42.4	38.7	48.7	41.6
Promote	40.9	41.3	23.1	40.3
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	66	75	78	72

For female respondents, $X^2 = .33$, df = 2, n.s.
For male respondents, $X^2 = 5.60$, df = 2, $p = .06$

Table 3

Mean Scores of Male and Female Respondents on Approach to Retaining Male or Female Employee

	Females			Males		
	Rachel	Ronald		Rachel	Ronald	
	Mean	Mean	t-test	Mean	Mean	t-test
Offer Raise[a]	2.85	2.52	1.79	2.67	2.67	0.00
Persuade	3.49	3.12	1.75	3.18	2.86	1.50
Find spouse position	3.47	2.64	3.70**	3.41	3.29	0.52
Don't influence	2.63	3.29	-3.13**	3.25	3.45	-0.91
N	72	65		73	76	

[a] Low score indicates agreement with each statement.
* $p < .01$
** $p < .001$

Table 4

Mean Scores For Male and Female Subjects on Request For Leave of Absence by Male or Female Employee

	Females			Males		
	Ruth	Ralph		Ruth	Ralph	
	Mean	Mean	t-test	Mean	Mean	t-test
Leave appropriate[a]	3.16	2.95	1.19	3.13	3.08	0.31
Give leave with pay[b]	1.81	1.85	-0.67	1.85	1.93	-1.43
Give leave without pay[b]	1.17	1.24	-1.01	1.18	1.34	-2.15*
N	74	64		72	76	

[a] High score indicates that leave is appropriate
[b] Low score indicates agreement
* $p < .05$

Table 5

Male and Female Respondents Distribution of Responses on Support of Spouse for Male or Female Manager

	Females		Males	
	Judy	Jack	Judy	Jack
Spouse should go to party	34.8%	51.4%	44.2%	42.9%
Go to parties alone	57.6	48.6	46.8	47.1
Stop attending parties	7.6	0.0	9.0	10.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	66	74	77	70

For female respondents, $X^2 = 8.31$, df = 2, $p < .01$

For male respondents, $X^2 = 0.04$, df = 2, n.s.

Footnotes

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